

My name is Hilary Bryant. I write this testimony to share my opposition to the proposed cuts to the DMHAS budget. Taking money away from mental health services in the state of Connecticut could bring great devastation to those receiving services, as well as those who work within the system. I know this to be true because I am a person with lived experience. Over the past ten years I have struggled with an eating disorder, depression, self-harm, substance use and suicidal ideation. I almost lost my life multiple times to the darkness of my own mind. I can't imagine what the outcome would have been had my parents not gotten me the best possible mental health care.

As an employee of Toivo by Advocacy Unlimited my eyes have been opened to the many services I never knew were available to those struggling with mental health and/or substance use issues. I often wish that I had been informed about advocacy groups, advanced directives, community conversations and peer run support groups when I was in the throes of crisis. We need to increase awareness, availability and access to programs and support provided by organizations such as CLRP and the regional boards, so we can enhance the conversation about mental health. Cutting funding for such programs will only perpetuate stigma, increase barriers between those seeking services and the support they need and make the quest for recovery even more challenging than it already is. The organizations who will be negatively affected by these budget cuts have given a voice to those with lived experience. These organizations make people like myself feel like our opinions matters. Putting weight on the voices of those who have been there is a positive shift in the way the system operates. To decrease funding of such organizations will only stunt growth and change in the state of Connecticut.

I urge you to reconsider the cuts you are about to make. We must move in support of the rights of those with mental health and/or substance use issues. As a state, we must show our support for those struggling, as well as for those who are doing their very best to support them. We can show the members of this state, as well as the rest of the country where our priorities lie. We can show them that we know, with the proper supports, recovery is possible.

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